

Charismatic non-native fox highly adaptable outside of its range

BY JESSIE COTY

This photo of a yawning red fox just stretching after a nap on the Lab's grounds is endearing. Yet, despite the charismatic nature of this ruddy-furred fellow, the red fox is an invasive non-native species in California's valley, lowland and coastal ecosystems. The red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) became widely established after being introduced in California for fox hunting and fur farming.

While a mammal of only moderate size, the red fox is a stellar hunter and also excels at adapting to a wide range of habitats. Unsurprisingly, they are increasingly seen, like this Lab visitor, within suburban areas. Their omnivorous diet consists of small mammals (rabbits, rodents), water and ground-nesting birds, fruits, berries, insects and carrion. Garbage and pet food also are quite palatable; red fox will raid both. Establishment of the nonnative red fox in native species' habitats, results in greater competition and predation pressures on native species. As a result, native species' populations decline or are displaced. Numerous examples exist. Among these, piping plover nest destruction in Monterey, California clapper rail declines in the SF Bay National Wildlife refuge, and the displacement of the San Joaquin kit fox. LLNL wildlife biologists point to the red fox as a possible cause for the much diminished presence of burrowing owls in LLNL's north buffer zone.

While the red fox is certainly a charismatic and impressive species, and sightings are appealing, outside of its native range, this fellow is capable of great harm to native species and ecosystems. Please do not feed any wildlife on the LLNL site, including the red fox.



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